SOME CLASSROOM — This carpeted, air conditioned, converted mobile home is typical of the Rapid Learning Center classrooms which serve the Texarkana, Ark., and the Liberty-Eylau school districts. The experimental project, first of its kind in the U.S. has attempted to move away from the traditional classroom look in order to involve slower or non-responsive students in their own educational process. (Staff Photo by Bob Burns)

FINAL TESTS DUE

Rapid Learning Center Nears 'Moment of Truth'

By LARRY POWELL
Staff Writer

"Involvement tells the story of the rapid learning centers which serve the Texarkana, Ark., and Liberty-Eylau school systems.

The fruit of that "involvement" may become evident next week, according to Rapid Learning Center Project Director Marty Filogamo. Sometime Monday he expects the final testing results of students in the program.

The implementation of the project is based on the idea, Filogamo explains, that educators "realize there needs to be some answers to some of these problems in education."

Students in the project — all volunteers who were suggested for the opportunity by teachers familiar with the student learning skills — are given the responsibility becoming involved in a learning process. The project eliminates the teacher who lectures and "pours" the knowledge out in front of the students. Instead, the students are given incentives other than just "making good grades" — for instance, trading stamps or free time. No students in forced to study.

"Every student," Filagamo says, referring to a traditional schoolroom pasttime, "needs to look out the window."

Unfortunately, Filogama bemoans, a "mix-up" between the Texarkana, Tex., School District and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare eliminated funds for the Texas school district's portion of the project.

The attempt to escape from the American "classroom" has led to learning stations in carpeted, quiet, air-conditioned mobile homes outfitted with "learning stations" rather than desks. Students are no longer "crammed" together in desks and forced to sit through hour-long lectures.

The students, during the first year of the project, studied math and reading. Each student, according to Filogamo, had to rate at least two grade levels below the national average for his grade in school.

"If you can't read," Filogamo explains the reasoning behind the two subject curriculum, "You can't study in the first place."

Students, he says, are allowed to proceed at their own speed. But, only the final testing results will show how well the experimentation has worked.

"And we tested them at a bad time," Filogamo thinks. "It was right at the end of school and the students were all anxious to get out of school."

Students who prove to be successful or moderately successful in the program will be enrolled in a "turnkey" classroom next year, according to the director. The "turnkey" program is designed to help the students maintain their newly achieved levels and strive for higher educational levels. Involved in the program are counseling and job motivational skills.

The "involvement" in the program is not limited to students, but may, Filogamo hopes, reach into the homes. "When a kid says 'I want to quit school' his parents don't know what to say to him," he explained.

The difference between the rapid learning project and other federally supported endeavors, he says, is "federal money with the concept of accountability."

"The U.S. Office of Education," he says, "is very careful not to say much to us about how to run our program. Of course, we get occasional guidance from them. But we get this money without too many strings attached."

The equipment — for the program — televiewers, film strips, records, and other instruments — are provided through a "performance contract" with Dorsett Educational Systems, Inc., of Norman, Okla. The idea is, Filagamo explains, "If the products don't work, the company losses money."

But, he says confidently the products do work and the final testing results will prove it. Reports on the project at various times have shown a sufficient improvement in most students to allow the project to claim a "successful" label. Those reports have drawn, Filagamo says, more than 600 educators into Texarkana in the past nine months to underwrite similar programs for more than 12,000 students in 34 U.S. school districts for the 1970 fall semester.

But, a reduction in federal funds may jeopardize the project. The Office of Education, after Texarkana was promised at least $600,000 for the program a second year, says $250,000 may be the limit. Model Cities funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Have purchased Dorsett's system for used in "Operation Second Chance" in Texarkana, a project to give dropouts one more try.

MARTY FILOGAMO
...directs project

AFL-CIO Leader Blasts Nixon Administration

WASHINGTON (AP) — Organized labor's leading economist, said Tuesday the Nixon Administration is pushing the nation's economy into a deepening recession that could plunge even further into a depression.

And, said Nathaniel Goldfinger of the AFL-CIO, the White House policies designed to curb inflation show no sign of slowing the sharpest rise in living costs in 20 years despite the hopeful predictions of President Nixon and his economic aides.

"We have the worst inflation in 20 years; we have the sharpest increase in unemployment in 10 years; we have sky-high interest rates—higher than at any time in the past 100 years or more," Goldfinger said in a recorded radio interview.

"Such sky-high interest rates push up all costs and all prices," he said in urging Nixon to use the selective credit controls Congress authorized four months ago.

"We have a continuing downward drift of the economy and a continuing drift of government economy policy, I believe that the situation at present is dangerous," Goldfingir said on Labor News Conference sponsored by the 13.6-million-member labor federation on the Mutual Broadcasting System.

"I would not rule out a depression, but the current situation certainly is one of economic recession and the economic recession is getting worse," he said.

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